To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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A NEW RURAL PATTERN

By Arthur E. Morgan*

Human genetics and human culture have greatly influenced each other. As illustration of the influence of human culture on genetic evolution, our vocal gans could have reached their present refinement only in society, and with the ntinuing tradition of speech. As a more general example, the relaxation of the ld of animal instinct as the major control of conduct in man could have come about ly as social usage and tradition developed as an alternative guide to action, an ternative which gave much greater freedom to adjust to varying circumstances.

I

The habitat of man and his immediate ancestors for millions of years d until very recently has been the primary group or small community. It is with ference to such a setting that both genetic and cultural evolution has taken ace, and to which men are most fundamentally adjusted. Human families have never rvived long in any other. It is strange that social scientists have not given re recognition to this important fact.

While capacity to be civilized is genetic, most of what we call civilization is accumulated discipline and conditioning. Its continuity depends on the ntinuity of the cultural tradition. In a cultural as well as a genetic sense we nnot have grandchildren if we have no children. To whatever extent there is a mplete break of the cultural tradition, to that extent civilization or culture isappears. I am inclined to think that the passing on of our basic cultural tradition should be a more serious concern that the passing on of our particular genetic train.

While specialized elements of our culture, such as literacy, the arts and ne professions, are largely transmitted through formal schooling, a far greater and re fundamental part is transmitted informally by contact of younger with older eople, as is natural in a small community. That more fundamental part includes ch traits as integrity, considerateness, fair play, neighborliness, mutual assistnce, and especially mutual confidence. Also acquired in this informal way are mmonsense judgment, tastes and appreciations.

These fundamental traits are largely transmitted early in life, by the

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time a boy or girl is ten or fifteen years old. Occasionally fundamental change of character takes place later in life, but only in a small proportion of cases. As a rule, the character of mature life is a maturing and strengthening of early established traits, not a new set of traits.

These fundamental traits are best transmitted to children in small social groups where people know and trust each other, where the finer personal traits dare have free play, and where children can exercise such traits without being imposed upon. In such environment children learn by experience that good will and fair pla and mutual regard can go along with practical caution and wisdom. I have observed that impractical, visionary idealists are ususally somewhat solitary or isolated pe sons who were denied the everyday give and take of normal small community society, out of which grows a combination of good will and commonsense judgment. In the cit on the other hand, where life is much sub-divided, children who are not greatly sheltered tend to develop a cynical, look-out-for-oneself view, which tends to disintegrate society. As seen in some cynics, in abstract idealists, theoretical radi and in various escapists, too great shelter in a city environment may lead to abstracted, oversimplified social and personal philosophy. In the city there is cons effort to recreate the small community by close social groups which maintain fine standards of good fellowship. Such elite groups, however, tend to include only a small part of the city population, and commonly only certain phases of living.

II

A fine, basic human culture, with its disciplines, judgments, tastes, appreciations, amenities and standards, is an exceedingly complex product of many generations. It is not learned chiefly from books, but from intimate association w persons who possess such culture. That intimate association should be in many phas and elements of living. If contact with such culture is broken there is a simplify and a debasing of personality, a loss of discrimination and fineness. For transmission of our best culture small group life is necessary. In earlier generations small group life was partly maintained by aristocratic society which limited perso association to small select groups, but this very process tended to cut off the aristocrat from common life experience, and tended to split society into classes.

A large part of the problems of social breakdown that are at present blamed on parents or school or other agency are, in my opinion, the result of discontinuity of our slowly developed cultural resources. This discontinuity looms as one of the major issues of our society.

Not only is the small community important as the transmitter of cultural inheritance, but also as a major source of population. The following figures, take largely from the reports of the Scripps Foundation for Population Research, the Population Reference Bureau, and the American Institute of Family Relations, are striking. If not recruited from small communities, including farm communities, ou large cities, because of inadequate birth rate, in four generations would shrink to perhaps a quarter or less of their present size. Probably less than 10% of young people who go from small communities to graduate from colleges or universities return to small communities to live. A thousand American college graduates in four generations, with birth rates now prevailing, would have about 125 descendants. A thousand persons who never finish elementary school, in four generations would have five thousand descendants--forty times as many as the college graduates. People distinction who were born and remain in small communities have about twice as many children as people of comparable quality who were born and continue to live in lar cities.

Migration of abler young people from small communities to the cities is steady, taking up nearly all the rural increase. It is skimming the small communi of its quality. Yet in future generations, the city must look to that source for

sustaining its population. When three quarters of Americans were rural, rural America--and rural Europe--could populate urban America without disaster. Today, with immigration cut off, and with about three quarters of Americans living in cities or urbanized suburbs, the city drain on rural America is extreme. This skimming of rural life and its extinction in the city lowers national quality. In Britain, where this urbanizing process is well advanced, the intelligence of the whole British people is being lowered two or three points each generation.

The dichotomy of society into marked urban and rural groups tends to result in dead conservatism in the small community and in loss of basic cultural tradition in the city groups. The city lacks the stabilization of a continuing basic tradition, while the small community lacks the stimulus of creative minds. The disintegrating effects of over-urbanization, with consequent impoverishment of continuing cultural inheritance, with excessive tax on human vitality, and with reduction of security and stability, has serious effects. The divorce rate has increased from one out of 17 in 1890 to one out of three in 1946. Delinquency and crime steadily increase, especially in cities, as does mental illness.

The small community is the original unit of social organization and government and is the best laboratory and training ground for human relations. The New England town meeting was not invented in America, but was a vestige of a nearly universal process which goes back to before the dawn of history. National and international unity must be based on human understanding, and the small community is the best environment for acquiring accurate understanding of human character and motive.

Taken all together, these influences on the cultural quality, and to some degree on the genetic quality, of both rural and urban life constitute one of the major threats to our civilization. Our small communities are being impoverished of their finest cultural tradition and are being made unattractive places for intelligent people to live, so that the quality of our own life is being degraded at its chief source. What the atomic bomb would do in an instant in eliminating city family lines is accomplished in four generations by present conditions, with the difference that the atomic bomb would not select the best from the whole country as its victims.

Our small communities have been abandoned by able young people partly because they did not obviously have the qualities or opportunities these people craved for themselves. The greatest handicaps of our small towns have been lack of outlook and conservatism. That conservatism in primitive society was a means for assuring that the slowly accumulated cultural inheritance would not be lost, and so constituted the community's greatest need and highest value. Under modern conditions of invention, scientific inquiry, and change, this trait, especially when the live, inquiring minds have left, becomes a great handicap. The American small community as it is today will need new outlook and new design if it is to become again a large factor in our national life.

III

What can be done? The conditions described are not incurable. The following steps would help.

1. Our country never has had a great, well-proportioned picture of the significance and possibility of the small community. The failure of the small community has not been primarily its inability to fulfill a great pattern, but rather the lack of any such pattern in people's minds. A first requirement is to help people become aware of the background of the community, its present plight, and its possibilities.

Such a picture must present the small community as a cross-section of our common life with economic and cultural resources which will satisfy all the major

needs and cravings of most men and women.

2. The attitude of rural life proponents toward farming, as the core and substance of rural life, must change. When the American constitution was adopted about 85% of Americans were farmers. That proportion has gradually shrunk to about 15%, and could shrink to 10% or less -- too small a base for a small community life which will give America its basic character. The small community must be seen as a place of widely varied opportunities and interests, of which farming will be only one. At the time Community Service, Inc., was organized this fact was very largely ignored, especially by the influential agricultural extension service. Attitudes are changing in this respect.

3. Decentralization of economic life is desirable and possible to a far larger degree than has been generally realized. This is more than ever true with power distribution and good highway transportation. It is taking place in some degree now, but unless it is preceded by development of a sound philosophy of small community life, decentralization may lead to rural slums in factory towns and deluxe residence communities elsewhere. Sound decentralization will involve both public and private policy. It should seldom be approached arbitrarily, but usually by discovering ways in which it will be natural and desirable. Some elements of continued centralization probably are inevitable and desirable.

One of the reasons for extreme class stresses is that management and ownership on the one hand, and labor on the other, have so little actual acquaintance with each other that each develops fantastic concepts of the other, helped by propagandists and cartoonists. These fantasies come to be taken as realities and constitute barriers to understanding. Decentralization and good small community relationships can greatly reduce such misunderstanding.

4. Relieved of unnecessary functions and population, cities would be far more wholesome and attractive, and could perform their essential functions under far more favorable conditions. They might then even maintain themselves by their own birth rates.

5. While modern technology has removed most of the material handicaps of small community life, a stable and wholesome development will require more than favorable economic conditions. A personal philosophy and an ethical commitment are necessary which will lead young people to choose careers which will serve the general good, rather than those which bring immediate personal satisfaction. This is especially necessary during the transition period while the pioneer work of community building is going on. The conscious development of such personality and the encouragement of a spirit of commitment and pioneering are necessary.

6. The disadvantages of present-day big cities are too permeating and complex to be brought under control, and are incurable. On the other hand, under present conditions small communities can be cured of most of their present defects and can have most of the advantages formerly associated with cities. Hence to turn attention of people generally to the small community is highly important.

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